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# UNPUBLISHED CORRESPONDENCE OF MME. DE STAËL WITH THOMAS JEFFERSON

INTRODUCTION BY MARIE G. KIMBALL

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AMONG the neglected papers in the folders of uncatalogued manuscripts of Thomas Jefferson are several letters of Madame de Staël to Jefferson, which, when their almost illegible French has been deciphered, prove of exceptional interest in relation to events of the present. These letters, among papers so long lost and but recently rediscovered, have never been translated or published, and thus come to us as a fresh pronouncement at the moment when their relevance is greatest. Jefferson's replies have also been preserved in the Library of Congress, and, although certain of them have been published in his works, the finding of the other half of the correspondence throws a new light even on the letters already printed, and the unity and importance of the whole series now become apparent.

The discussion turns on the Napoleonic Wars, the struggle for commercial supremacy on the ocean, the freedom of the seas, the intervention of America in European affairs, and the efforts of the South American countries to attain independence. Through all the varied subjects, however, runs as a fundamental note a passionate belief in human liberty on the part of both correspondents. Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, the counsellor of the Moderates in the French Revolution, and the champion of freedom in politics, religion and education, was equalled in his devotion to the cause he had at heart by the daughter of Necker, the steadfast opponent of Napoleon, the apostle of liberty for oppressed nationalities and of freedom in literature and art. As a unique interchange of ideas between two of the foremost minds of the time, these letters have seldom been equalled. The striking analogies between sit-

uations a hundred years ago and those of today, with similarities and differences in the position of the various contestants, will immediately suggest themselves to everyone.

The first two letters are necessarily introductory, as the friendship had lapsed for nearly twenty years. Later ones, beside their main subject, clear up some long disputed questions. Thus the charge that Madame de Staël made overtures to Bonaparte on his return from Elba is controverted by a passionate denial of which the sincerity can scarcely be doubted. The letters furnish also remarkable examples of Jefferson's gift of political prophecy, exemplified not only in regard to Napoleon, but also in regard to conditions in Mexico.

*Mme. de Staël to Jefferson*

April 25, 1807.

A gentleman, M. Ray, as much esteemed as anyone in either hemisphere, gives me opportunity, Sir, to offer you a testimony of my interest and respect. These sentiments have suffered no change in the few free and liberal minds remaining in France. Your name is sacred here and if it is not mentioned in the market place there is nowhere else that it is not repeated. Although, indeed, it is spoken softly, it is also softly that conscience speaks.

I am going to Coppet. Residence in Paris has been forbidden me, but now and then I shall see those people who care for you more intimately than the rest of the world which honours and admires you—the world, at least, which thinks and judges according to reflection and truth.

When shall we see each other again? I expect my son will go to America next year—perhaps we shall all go. If this Old World has room for but one single man, what should we do there? The events of this summer will be decisive, at least in the judgment of men, but He who disposes of all things will perhaps reserve to Himself the ultimate decision in this great struggle between might and right.

Adieu, Sir. Remember me to her who has the honour of solacing your life, and who performs this noble task so well. I remember her as more brilliant than all the grand dames of this old world.

It is long ago that I lost my father, of whom you were so fond. Father, country, everything is over for me—my country would re-awaken if you were to return to it. I hope God will reunite me with my father.

Adieu, Sir. Permit me the honour of sending you something I have written. You would find your name there in some fashion if there were merely difficulties in the way. Impossibility alone prevents.

Accept my respectful tributes

N. dS.

*Jefferson to Mme. de Staël*

Washington, July 16, 1807.

Mme. de Staël de Holstein :

I have received, Madam, the letter which you have done me the favor to write from Paris on the 24th of April, and M. le Ray de Chaumont informs me that the book you were so kind as to confide to him, not having reached Nantes when he sailed, will come by the first vessel from that port to this country. I shall read with great pleasure whatever comes from your pen, having known its powers when I was in a situation to judge, nearer at hand, the talents which directed it.

Since then, Madam, wonderful are the scenes which have past! Whether for the happiness of posterity must be left to their judgment. Even of their effect on those now living, we, at this distance, undertake not to decide. Unmeddling with the affairs of other nations, we presume not to prescribe or censure their course. Happy, could we be permitted to pursue our own in peace, and to employ all our means in improving the condition of our citizens. Whether this will be permitted, is more doubtful now than at any preceding time. We have borne patiently a great deal of wrong, on the consideration that if nations go to war for every degree of injury, there would never be peace on earth. But when patience has begotten false estimates of its motives, when wrongs are pressed because it is believed they will be borne, resistance becomes morality.

The grandson of Mr. Necker cannot fail of a hearty welcome in a country which so much respected him. To myself, who loved the virtues, honored the great talents of the grandfather, the attentions I received in his natal house and particular esteem for yourself, are additional titles to whatever service I can render him . . . He will find a sincere welcome at Monticello, where I shall then be in the bosom of my family, occupied with my books and my farms, and enjoying under the government of a successor, the freedom and tranquillity which I have endeavored to secure for others.

Accept the homage of my respectful salutations, and assurances of great esteem and consideration.

TH. JEFFERSON.

*Mme. de Staël to Jefferson*

November 10, 1812.

Stockholm

I have finally escaped, my dear Sir, from the yoke which weighs so heavily upon half of Europe and I can reply freely to the letter which you did me the honour of sending by M. le Ray de Chaumont. Present events induce me to write you my thoughts and I hope you will receive them with a friendliness as great as the sincerity which inspires them.

I do not profess to be acquainted with the circumstances which have given rise to the differences between America and England, I make bold to present the question to you in a broader way. You witnessed the first days of the French Revolution and I recall that, at my father's house, you told the exaggerated radicals that their

demagogic principles would lead to despotism in France. Your predictions have been fulfilled. Europe and the human race are bent under the will of a single man who wished to establish a universal monarchy. Already Germany, Italy, Holland and Denmark are provinces of France. Free governments are what Emperor Napoleon hates especially. He makes use of you now against England, but when he hoped to conclude a treacherous peace with England you surely know that he proposed to aid her in making the United States an appanage of an English prince, a plan which she rejected with the greatest disdain.

If by a misfortune which would plunge all the world into mourning, England were to be subjected and her navy were to fall into the hands of the conqueror of the earth, it is against you that he would turn, for your principles are most in the world opposed to his and he would wish to efface from the very pages of history the time when men were not subjected to the despotism of one man. Your old friends M. de la Fayette and M. de Sully would speak just as I do were they once more permitted to break silence.

You tell me that America has nothing to do with the continent of Europe. Has she nothing to do with the human race? Can you be indifferent to the cause of free nations, you the most republican of all? Are you indifferent to the cause of thinking men, you, my dear Sir, who are placed in the very first rank of them? If you were to pass three months in France your generous blood would boil in your veins and you could not bear to serve Napoleon's projects, even though believing it for the good of your country.

For ten years England has been the sole barrier against this singular despotism, which unites all the means barbarism and civilization can furnish to debase humanity. When a nation of twelve million souls is obliged to struggle against one hundred millions coerced by one man, is it astonishing that certain abuses creep into the means it is obliged to employ in order to resist?

All your old friends in Europe, all those who thought as you did when you upheld the independence of America, expect you to put an end to a war which seems to them a civil war, for free people are all of the same family.—Yes, the greatest misfortune which could come to the American people in the present war would be to do real damage to their enemies, for then the English would no longer be in a condition to serve you as a bulwark against the despotism of the Emperor of France, or rather of Europe. When he shall have overthrown the liberty of England it will be yours that he will next attack. The Emperor, so versed in the art of dissimulation, does not even conceal his resolution of destroying every nation which desires to be independent. It is thus impossible to be in doubt as to the intention of this man who is even more remarkable as a system than as a character, and this system is made up of all the most unphilosophical ideas which have ever oppressed the world.

Pardon me, my dear Sir, for having ventured to speak to you with so much frankness. I can view without suffering the names of German princes on the lists of the allies of despotism, but the name of Jefferson in such company—it is this which troubles the friends of liberty, and

you will perhaps end by yourself discouraging the political belief which you have all your life so bravely professed.

Reply to me, my dear Sir, in care of your consul in Sweden, M. Yseyer, and tell me above all that you are not displeased with me for having presumed to address you as you would have addressed my father were he, whose spirit was as devoted to order as to liberty, still on this earth.

Adieu, adieu. God bless you and deliver Europe.

Farewell

NECKER DE  
STAEL HOLSTEIN

*Jefferson to Mme. de Staël*

United States of America, May 28, 1813.

Madame la Baronne de Staël-Holstein:

I received with great pleasure, my dear Madam and friend, your letter of Nov. 10, from Stockholm and am sincerely gratified by the occasion it gives me of expressing to you the sentiments of high respect and esteem which I entertain for you. It recalls to my remembrance a happy portion of my life passed in your native city, then the seat of the most amiable and polished society in the world, and of which yourself and your venerable father were such distinguished members. But of what scenes has it since been the theatre, and with what havoc has it overspread the earth! Robespierre met the fate, and his memory the execration, he so justly merited. The rich were his victims and perished by thousands. It is by millions that Bonaparte destroys the poor, and he is eulogized and defied by the sycophants even of science. These merit more than the mere oblivion to which they will be consigned; and the day will come when a just posterity will give to their hero the only pre-eminence he has earned, that of having been the greatest of the destroyers of the human race. . .

To complete and universalize the desolation of the globe, it has been the will of Providence to raise up at the same time a tyrant as unprincipled and overwhelming for the ocean. Not in the poor maniac George but in his Government and Nation. Bonaparte will die and his tyrannies with him, but a Nation never dies. The English Government and its pyrratical principles and practice have no fixed term of duration. Europe feels, and is writhing under the scorching whips of Bonaparte; we are assailed by those of England. . . . We concluded that the war she had for years been waging against us might as well become a war on both sides . . . and we now make full reprisals where before we made none. England is, in principle, the enemy of all maritime nations as Bonaparte is of the continental; and I place in the same line of insult to the human understanding the pretension of conquering the ocean, to establish Continental rights, as that of conquering the continent to restore maritime rights. No, my dear Madam, the object of England is *the permanent dominion of the ocean*, and the *monopoly of the trade of the world*. To secure this she must keep a larger fleet than her resources will maintain. The resources of other nations must then be impressed to supply the deficiency of her own. This is sufficiently developed and evidenced by her successive strides towards the usurpation

of the sea. . . . Finally, that her views may no longer rest on inference, in a recent debate, her minister has declared in open parliament that the object of the present war is a *monopoly of commerce*.

In some of these atrocities France has kept pace with her fully in speculative wrong which her impotence only shortened in practical execution. This was called retaliation by both; each charging the other with the initiation of the outrage. As if two combatants might retaliate on an innocent bystander, the blows they received from each other. To make war on both would have been ridiculous. In order, therefore, to single out an enemy, we offered to both that if either would revoke its hostile decrees, and the other should refuse, we would interdict all intercourse whatever with that other; which would be war of course, as being an avowed departure from neutrality. France accepted the offer and revoked her decrees as to us. England . . . refused. . . . We thereon declared war, and with abundant additional cause. . . . The sword . . . can never again be sheathed, until the personal safety of an American on the ocean, among the most important and most vital of the rights we possess, is completely provided for. . . .

England has misrepresented to all Europe this ground of the war. . . . She has pretended we have entered into the war to establish the principle of "free bottom, free goods," or to protect her seamen against her own rights over them. We contend for neither of these. She pretends we are partial to France, that we have observed a fraudulent and unfaithful neutrality between her and her enemy. She knows this to be false, and that if there has been any irregularity in our proceedings towards the belligerents it has been in her favor. Her ministers are in possession of full proof of this. . . .

Shall I apologize to you, my dear Madam, for this long political letter? But yours justifies the subject, and my feelings must plead for the unreserved expression of them; and they have been the less reserved, as being from a private citizen, retired from all connection with the government of his country, and whose ideas, expressed without communication with anyone, are neither known nor imputable to them.

The dangers of the sea are now so great and the possibilities of interception by sea and land such that I shall subscribe no name to this letter. You will know from whom it comes by its reference to the date of time and place of yours, as well as by its subject in answer to that. This omission must not lessen in your view the assurance of my great esteem, of my sincere sympathies for the share which you bear in the afflictions of your country, and the deprivations to which a lawless will has subjected you. . . . That you may long live in health and happiness . . . and leave to the world a well educated and virtuous representative and descendant of your honored father, is the ardent prayer of the sincere and respectful friend who writes this letter.

*Jefferson to Mme. de Staël*

Monticello in Virginia, July 3, 1815.

Madame la Baronne de Staël-Holstein:

Dear Madam:

I considered your letter of Nov. 10, 1812, as an evidence of the interest you were so kind to take in the welfare of the United States,

and I was even flattered by your exhortation to avoid taking any part in the war then raging in Europe, because they were a confirmation of the policy I had myself pursued, and which I thought and still think should be the governing canon of our republic. Distance, and difference of pursuits, of interests, of connections, and other circumstances prescribe to us a different system, having no object in common with Europe but a peaceable interchange of mutual comforts for mutual wants. But this may not always depend on ourselves; and injuries may be so accumulated by a European power as to pass all bounds of wise forbearance. This was our situation at the date of your letter. A long course of injuries systematically pursued by England, and finally, formal declarations that she would neither redress nor discontinue their infliction, had fixed the epoch which rendered an appeal to arms unavoidable. In the letter of May 28, 1813, which I had the honor of writing to you, I entered into such details of these injuries and of our unremitting endeavors to bring them to a peaceable end, as the narrow limits of a letter permitted.

I learned with great pleasure of your return to your native country. It is the only one which offers elements of society analogous to the powers of your mind, and sensible of the flattering distinction of possessing them. It is true that the great events which made an opening for your return have been reversed. But not so, I hope, the circumstances which may admit its continuance. On these events I shall say nothing. At our distance we hear too little truth and too much falsehood to form correct judgments concerning them; and they are moreover foreign to our umpirage. We wish the happiness and prosperity of every nation; we did not believe either of these promoted by the former pursuits of the present ruler of France, and hope that his return, if the nation wills it to be permanent, may be marked by those changes which the solid good of his own country, and the peace and well-being of the world, may call for.

But these things I leave to whom they belong; the object of this letter being only to convey to you a vindication of my own country, and to have the honor of a new occasion of tendering you the homage of my great consideration and respectful attachment.

TH. JEFFERSON.

(Political pamphlet enclosed.)

*Mme. de Staël to Jefferson*

Pisa, January 6, 1816.

My dear Sir:

I do not exaggerate my sentiments toward you when I tell you that the letter you were so good as to send me when in Sweden is locked in an iron box with my father's last will and testament. I often read it over, the splendid prophecy of the overthrow of Bonaparte by the spirit of liberty—at this moment when our poor Europe no longer hears anything which resembles this. The greatest evil which Bonaparte inflicted on the world was so to have confused tyranny with liberty that people profess to be liberal while re-establishing the old despotism. I can hardly believe in its continuing, nevertheless, but as I was nineteen years old twenty-six years ago, in 1789, I begin to fear



that I shall not live long enough to see the statue of my father in the Hôtel de Ville. It can only be placed there in the day when a true representative government shall be recognized as the shield and glory of France.

Everywhere people are resurrecting superstitions that no one can now believe. Thus Dom Pedro of Portugal has had Inez de Castro exhumed, to crown her after her death.

I do not know whether the papers have told you that I had upheld the cause of your America against a very noble adversary, the Duke of Wellington. If you should succeed in destroying slavery in the south there would be at least one government in the world as perfect as the human mind can conceive.

I was in Italy when your letter of July reached me. I fled France the moment Bonaparte disembarked there. Nothing could induce me to have dealings with him. I cannot yet make up my mind to return to France while foreigners are masters of it. Meanwhile it is to Paris, care of M. de Lessen, that I beg you to address me a letter, if you still think me worthy of one.

Yesterday I was at Leghorn to salute you across the sea. It seemed to me as though I could hear you over the waves.

My son still has in mind to visit you. It is a pilgrimage to reason and liberty which he wishes to make and you shall be the recipient of the first offerings. He is a grandson worthy of M. Necker. My daughter, he and I, all hold him as our patron saint on earth.

My daughter, who is eighteen years old, is going to be married to the Duke de Broglie, formerly, and now once more, a peer of France, the grandson of the Marshal [de Broglie], and a friend of M. de la Fayette. That tells everything in the matter of his political views. Our family is still a little intellectual oasis where Franklin, Washington and Jefferson are worshipped as in their own country.

Please accept all the reverence of my heart. May my poor talents, if you can believe me, testify to my attachment for you.

NECKER DE STAEL H.

Be good enough to give me some news of South America. I hope for its independence.

*Jefferson to Mme. de Staël*

Monticello, Sept. 5, 1816.

M. de la baronne de Staël Holstein :

A request, dear Madam, in your letter of Jan. 6 gives you the trouble of reading this. You therein ask information of the state of things in S. America. This is difficult to be understood even to us who have some stolen intercourse with those countries ; but in Europe I suppose it is impossible. That mendacity which Spain, like England, makes a principal piece of the machine of her government, confounds all enquiry, by so blending truth and falsehood, as to make them indistinguishable. According to Spanish accounts they have won great victories in battles which they never fought, and slaughtered thousands of rebels whom they have never seen. And, as in our revolution, the English were perpetually gaining victories over us until they conquered themselves out of our Northern continent, so Spain is in a fair way

of conquering herself out of the Southern one. [There follows a discussion of the various Latin-American countries, concluding with Mexico.] This, first of all the Spanish possessions, and superior to Spain itself in extent, fertility, population, riches and information, has nothing to fear from the pigmy power of Spain.

So far then all would seem to be well. But their real difficulties are not how to repel the efforts of the mother country, but how to silence and disarm the schisms among themselves. In all those countries the most inveterate divisions have arisen, partly among the different castes, partly among rival leaders. . . . In the meantime everything is at the mercy of the military leaders. The whole southern continent is sunk in the deepest ignorance and bigotry. A single priest is more than a sufficient opponent to a whole army, and were it not that the lower clergy, as poor and oppressed as the people themselves, has very much taken sides with the revolutionists, their cause would have been desperate from the beginning. But when their independence shall be established, the same ignorance and bigotry will render them incapable of forming and maintaining a free government, and it is excruciating to believe that all will end in military despotism under the Bonaparte of their region.

The only comfortable prospect which this beclouded horizon offers is that these revolutionary movements, having excited into exercise that common sense which nature has implanted into everyone, it will go on advancing towards the lights of cultivated reason, will become sensible of its own powers, and in time be able to form some canons of freedom, and to restrain their leaders to an observance of them. In the mean time we must pray to God as most heartily we do for your country, that "he will be pleased to give them patience under their sufferings, and a happy issue out of all their afflictions."

Your resolution not to revisit your own country, while under foreign force, is worthy of you. No patriotism requires us to incur the pain of witnessing miseries which we cannot remedy or alleviate, and towards which, even in absence, your pen may do more than your presence. . . . In general it is sinful, but now pious, to pray for war and strife among nations as the only means of dissolving their criminal combinations.

I congratulate you on the happy union of your daughter with a peer and patriot of France; and should your son realize the hope you hold up to us of visiting this sanctuary of the unfortunate of every country where "the wolf dwells with the lamb, and the leopard lieth down with the kid," he will be hailed as the son of M. de Staël and the grandson of M. Necker, and will see an example, in the peaceable reunion here of so many worthies of his own country, how much more happy the tolerant principles of his great ancestor might have made them at home.

Permit me here to renew the assurances of high consideration and esteem.

TH. JEFFERSON.